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The art of writing: disguise and recognition in Nelly Richard's *Avanzada*

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Abstract

Now that different publications and exhibitions have started to revisit the history of art produced in Chile during the dictatorship of General Pinochet (particularly that of the *Escena de avanzada*), this article examines the critical role of Nelly Richard's practice of writing as an attempt to constitute the *avanzada ex nihilo* and to resist state repression through its paradoxical coupling of disguise and recognition. By discussing key texts from Richard's corpus of work, and paying attention to their engagement with different artworks during this period, the article suggests that her writing embodies a programmatic strategy of dissidence and disruption and a desire to transform the hierarchical military coup into a horizontal scene in which established meanings are blown apart and re-inscribed.

Keywords: art writing, Chile, *Escena de avanzada*, Nelly Richard

In 1986 the Australian journal *Art & Text* published a special bilingual edition featuring Nelly Richard's book *Margins and Institutions: Art in Chile since 1973*. These were the final years of General Pinochet's dictatorship (which lasted from 1973 to 1989) and the book was part of the touring exhibition *Chile: an Audiovisual Documentation*, a show that did not comprise objects but rather documentary materials about art produced during the period: slideshows, sound tapes, a video and *Margins and Institutions* itself. The initiators of the project, Juan Dávila (a Chilean artist who had exiled himself to Australia) and Paul Foss (the editor of *Art & Text*), state in the introduction to the book that they found it more difficult to accommodate

this publication than the rest of the elements of the project. Describing the book as a ‘marginal enterprise’ and the exhibition’s ‘poor cousin’, they comment that the Australian funding bodies treated it ‘as a minor element of the show’: indeed, ‘it was the gambit of merely offering images of Chile which secured the funding in the first place’ (Richard 1986: 1). Foss (2014) mentions that very few of the 1,500 copies were sold and that he ended up discarding the rest.¹

In spite of this initial reception, *Margins and Institutions* went on to represent a critical milestone for the study of Chilean art during the dictatorship, circulating for years in fading photocopies until its recent re-publication in 2007 by the Santiago-based publishing house Metales Pesados, which is now in its third edition. One essential explanation for the importance given to the text today relates to Richard’s attempt to create an art scene *ex nihilo*, an aspect reflected in the text’s peculiar coupling of art and critical writing. Richard, a French graduate from La Sorbonne, was drawn to Chile in 1970; it was a time of political polarization during which the socialist project was taking shape in the country, a process that culminated in the election of president Salvador Allende. This French intellectual background is obvious in Richard’s baroque style of writing. Her texts, abundant in ‘rhetorical twists’ (Del Sarto 2010: 2), draw on the traditions of feminist critique and poststructuralism and present ideas in a fragmented, discontinuous manner, allowing the constant erosion of meaning. Indeed, she was instrumental in the dissemination of authors such as Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes and Julia Kristeva in the Chilean context. Her critical project explicitly tried to differentiate itself from both the traditional academic essay and the promotional discourses of art galleries, which ‘present, explain or consecrate the work’ (Richard 1986: 45). In contrast, Richard aimed at constituting an art scene through critical discourse itself.

Devoted to the Chilean *Escena de avanzada* (including the work of artists such as Carlos Leppe, Eugenio Dittborn, Carlos Altamirano, Catalina Parra, Raúl Zurita and Diamela Eltit, amongst several others), *Margins and Institutions* describes an art scene that ‘exploded’ during the years of the dictatorship, ‘with a body of works which, inscribed in the living materiality of the body and its social landscape, proposed a new topology of the real’ (Richard 1986: 18). The *avanzada* was an interdisciplinary group that brought together visual arts, poetry, film, video and critical texts (by theorists like Richard herself and others such as Ronald Kay and Adriana Valdés), and made use of both the body as a medium for complex art actions or performances, and of the urban space as the support for interventions that infiltrated the social and institutional networks of the city. An experimental approach to and a questioning of photography also represented an important feature in many of the works, as were gestures such as parody, pastiche and collage.

The following discussion will propose that this coupling of art and writing in Richard’s critical project could be considered as a programmatic strategy of dissidence and disruption. After a brief discussion of the context in which Richard positioned her critical endeavour, the notion of writing as resistance will be developed in two dimensions. The first one is the author’s effort to create the *avanzada* scene through her writing, while, at the same time, being very careful about the potential dangers of an easy institutional appropriation. The second is the complex relationship between Richard’s writing and the public, which is invited to actively engage with the document rather than with the artwork, thus becoming the late accomplice of Richard’s project. The latter will be discussed using Philip Auslander’s theoretical framework that explores the relationship between the public and the mediated form of an art object. In this delayed encounter the latent spectator might be able to recognize and decipher the meaning of a work – despite it being disguised at times – and reactivate the critical potential of it.

[A]From the battlefield

According to Richard (1986: 17), the key characteristic of the *avanzada* constitutes the context and time in which it emerged, when all the traditional social and cultural references of Chilean society had ‘floundered’. She presents the *avanzada* as marginal to the ‘reconstruction’ process led by the dictatorship, affecting several dimensions of Chilean life and politics: from the transformation and cancellation of various democratic institutions (most notoriously the Congress) to the radical imposition of a neo-liberal economic model influenced by Milton Friedman’s ‘shock’ doctrine (Arriagada 1998: 61). The years that followed the military coup were characterized by fierce repression and state violence. One of the most immediate measures of the new government was the exile, torture and disappearance of citizens linked to the Left, while university tutors who had supported the previous regime were dismissed on political grounds. This systematic filtering had been eased by the late 1970s and limited forms of dissidence and protest were already being tolerated by the time of publication of *Margins and Institutions*, yet the line between the forbidden and the authorized was not clear-cut but was permanently shifting during the dictatorship (Human Rights Watch 1998).

Similarly, the dictatorship harboured an agenda of cultural reconstruction, aimed at ‘cleansing’ the aesthetic of the recent Marxist past and promoting a military dimension in the material culture of the everyday (Errázuriz and Quijada Leiva 2012). This agenda also guided the new administration of the National Museum of Fine Arts (directed by the visual artist Lily Garafulic from 1973 to 1977), whose programme turned to rescuing and exhibiting Chilean ‘old masters’ to the detriment of contemporary art, while embarking on a covert process of privatization (Avalos and Quezada 2014).

While Richard (1986: 19) positions the *avanzada* works as resisting this new and dominant cultural apparatus, she also stresses ‘the dangers of their forms becoming an instrument of the opposition’s progressive ideology’ within the ‘traditional repertoire of the left’. The latter is a debatable statement since it creates a simplified dualist division that presents the *avanzada* as a ‘third way’ whereas, in reality, there were other active groups operating independently at the time, including, for instance, the TAV (*Taller de Artes Visuales* founded in 1974). The agenda of this print and graphic arts workshop privileged production and teaching and was therefore different from Richard’s poststructuralist preoccupations, yet its members were in permanent dialogue with the *avanzada* and with Richard herself and held critical discussions about the expansion of their practice (Baeza and Parra 2012). Furthermore, as authors such as Carla Machiavello (2011) and Francisco Godoy Vega (2012) suggest, Richard’s insistence on denying any previous referents and international influences on the *avanzada* contributed to the isolation of the scene, which became self-referential, and could therefore be regarded as a new orthodoxy rather than a fresh alternative driven by a less dogmatic approach.

Despite the former remarks, in a later book – *The Insubordination of Signs: Political Change, Cultural Transformation and Poetics of the Crisis* (published in Spanish in 1994, and in English in 2004) – Richard insists on the idea that the works produced by the *avanzada* were marginal on both sides of the political spectrum. They could neither be accommodated into the prevalent economic or social structures nor used by the opposition, ‘not even as an explicit sign of dissidence’ (Richard 2004: 4). If the act of insubordination is one of wilful disobedience associated with military forms of hierarchy and power, Richard (2004: 32) explains how the *avanzada* sought ‘partial operations capable of altering and subverting the system through the micrological play of *situated* action’ (original emphasis), that is, through the intervention of a cunning insider. She describes these practices as transversal, not obvious,

full of ‘certain moves intended to divert the course of official interpretations using strategically deceptive meanings that would escape censorship’ and of ‘*interstitial* tactics’ of subversion (Richard 2004: 47), occurring between layers, in the gaps or cracks. ‘Fisuras’ [Fissures], is indeed, a recurring term used in Richard’s writing, along with words describing rupture, such as ‘cortes’ [cuts], ‘fracturas’ [fractures] or ‘campos minados’ [minefields]. In the same vein, the author mentions that she intended ‘to sharpen certain points, re-intensify certain cuts, to try to bring new energy to zones of tension whose critical potential still seems blocked due to a lack of new readings’ (Richard 2004: 108).

Through these references to oblique operations, Richard makes sophisticated use of these terms, which otherwise would appear as plainly violent and bellicose. In a subsequent book, *Fracturas de la memoria* (2007b), for instance, she conceives the cultural realm as a ‘campo de batalla’ [battlefield] and ‘trincheras’ [trench], and imagines the role of the artist as multiplying ‘los focos guerrilleros’ [the guerrilla spotlights] (Richard 2007b: 69). Yet she also adds that this battle would be fought through the friction of different postures in an agitated field (Richard 2007b: 69). Whereas practices of sabotage in art have been often conceived as addressing the creative force of destruction, Richard appeals to the crack, the abrasion and rasping of opposing views that operate in the same field.

This position gives a particular form to Richard’s attempt to resist state violence and repression through her writing: the author’s sabotage operates by opening up a space for counter-institutional practices to gain visibility (neither she nor the *avanzada* artists worked undercover), while being aware of the need to mask their interventions. This concealment might have contributed to the marginality of the scene and the lack of a direct audience for it during the dictatorship.

[A] Opaqueness and visibility

Una mirada sobre el arte en Chile is a brief text self-published by Richard in 1981 in the form of a photocopied notebook, with an original print of 100 copies. Largely considered to be the draft of the later *Margins and Institutions*, it has also been read by Carolina Olmedo as a first attempt to inscribe the *avanzada* in the history of Chilean art. The book, writes Olmedo, brings together a variety of works by different artists, art collectives and critical writers who, while working separately at first, started to be established as a more defined group through Richard's writing, which also invested it with a particular political discourse and sense of purpose (2012: 83). This echoes other readings of Richard's work on the *avanzada* and the constitution of this category inside the author's writings (e. g. Del Sarto 2010). The notion of a 'tribe' describes a group whose members initially did not recognize each other, and who were first introduced as such to the public through Richard's text (Richard 2004: 78). Furthermore, according to Valdés (in Richard 2004: 78), the collective 'establishe[d] its identity within the text itself', and it was the text that produced a 'recognition' effect: 'what one individual says in one place appears elsewhere in another's voice, a voice that one would not have imagined. Then a recognition effect is produced: it seems as though a continuity of intentionality must have existed after all'.

This text circulated amongst the small circle of artists and critics that formed a fairly dynamic scene of art production and writing around galleries such as *Cromo* (where Richard acted as curator) and *Epoca* (both founded in 1977), *CAL* (1979) and *Sur* (1980). Richard also edited two issues of *CAL*, a magazine linked to the gallery that published four numbers from June to October 1979. In her work as editor, she invited artists such as Carlos Altamirano and writers like Ronald Kay to submit contributions, using the publication as a vehicle to make the *avanzada* better known. The French and the North American cultural institutes also became hubs of cultural activity during the dictatorship, yet Valdés (1987, 2006) and Olmedo (2012) suggest that these spaces were fairly isolated. Self-published editions of texts and

catalogues were always small in number and their distribution consisted in photocopies being shared amongst a small circle of art enthusiasts.

The international character of *Margins and Institutions* was therefore a significant step up for Richard's expectations for the consolidation and resonance of this scene.² Shortly after the publication Richard hosted a seminar at FLACSO (a Latin American research centre with offices in several countries from the region) in Santiago to discuss the importance of her publication from different disciplinary perspectives. Several of the contributions addressed the difficulty of reaching a large public because of the conditions imposed by the dictatorial regime: the country's isolation, social exclusion, a broken university system, and a fragile publishing industry. Valdés (1987: 86) explored this problem by suggesting that, even though there was a desirable and desired interlocutor, this domestic context led the *avanzada* to be perceived as something technical and difficult, and therefore that the group 'se fundó y se consumió en su propio deseo' [it was founded and consumed itself in its own desire]. These circumstances reveal a tension between the marginality of a direct audience for this work, and Richard's ambition to create an art scene through her writing.

Visibility was significant for both Richard and the *avanzada*. This explains the use of spaces described in the previous paragraphs, none of which was clandestine. The *avanzada* wanted to be 'seen and tested' in places endorsed by the authorities: '*Their work opposed the rules, but from inside*' (Richard 1986: 24; original emphasis). Yet in the context of censorship and repression artists also needed to conceal their practices with a visual language that Richard (2007b: 22) describes as travestied, dressed up, disguised. Gestures were visible yet meanings not necessarily evident. As Valdés (2006: 279) puts it, there was an apparent smoothness, under which misunderstandings, ambiguities and complicities proliferated. For instance, some performances by Carlos Leppe, such as *El Perchero* (The Coat Hanger) from 1975 or *Sala de Espera* (Waiting Room) from 1980, articulate issues of identity and sexual

ambiguity by using the body as a space of camouflage, transvestism and simulacrum. In *El Perchero* the body of the artist dressed-up as a woman is not exhibited directly but through three folded life-size photographs hung on a structure with the use of coat-hangers. Intimate body parts, such as the artist's groin, are both highlighted and concealed by white bandage and cut-out clothes, revealing one of the artist's breasts in a manner that emphasizes physical repression and the tyranny of social control over the body. The presence/absence of the artist – whose body is visible but as a photographic and somewhat fragmented record – also resonates with the paradoxical corporality of those 'disappeared' during Pinochet's government: absent yet not officially recognized as being dead.³

This disguised language also speaks of the fact that the longing for visibility is combined with a desire to preserve some wilful opacity in order to prevent an easy institutional accommodation and to resist any 'totalization of sense' (Richard 1986: 19). Like someone who disrupts or obstructs the functioning of an organization by disguising the intentions behind that act, in the author's account the artist becomes the master of self-censorship, conscious of staging an operation that would 'safeguard his or her right to speak' (Richard 1986: 30). While the artworks themselves were not surreptitious, they were full of non-explicit meanings and therefore their critical potential could be deemed '*clandestine*' (Richard 1986: 31; original emphasis).

This wilful opacity could be further exemplified by discussing the presence of one particular work by Eugenio Dittborn in the book. Dittborn is one of the most internationally renowned Chilean artists, and his *Aeropostales* (Airmail Paintings) have been exhibited in several of the most established museums around the world. Dittborn sources images from outdated magazines, newspapers and police records to reproduce them in different sections of non-woven fabric. These sections are then stitched together to form a single piece, a painting or *photosilkscreen*, which, once ready, is folded to make a small parcel that is then put inside

an envelope and posted to an international address. Engaging with the issues of circulation and the marks of travel through this use of images, the operation of his *Aeropostales* is simple yet visually effective. Furthermore, through this operation Dittborn was able to trick Pinochet's censorship apparatus at their point of origin, and also challenged the distribution of knowledge between centre and periphery (Cubitt 1994).

Margins and Institutions reproduces the image of one small section of *Aeropostal № 20* in a chapter that problematizes the understanding of Chilean and Latin American art as being subordinated to ideals and canons imported from Europe, a conception that leaves little or no space for local practices that differ from the romantic ideal of the aboriginal and the exotic. The image features four mug shots of petty criminals alongside four images of American natives, all stressing the relationship between photography (an European import) and power in a context of state control. The work brings together different techniques: photography, silkscreen, calligraphy and painting. There is a blurred phrase in English, which grows from two words in the first panel to a complete sentence in the fourth one; the final phrase, barely legible because of the faded letters, reads 'to join by mean of a suture the lips of a wound', mirroring the vocabulary of injuries and cuts used by Richard in her writing.

Unlike standard art catalogues, which describe or refer to specific pieces, Richard does not write directly about this *Aeropostal* (or any other), but she discusses how the *avanzada* works speak of the uprooting of Latin American identity through the use of fragmentation and collage, emphasizing the precariousness of the local context in relation to the technologies and knowledge imported from Europe. This understanding of a disjointed and patched identity is very relevant to Dittborn's *œuvre*: Richard portrays Dittborn as an expert at revealing the lack of fit between dissimilar cultural systems and exposing the tensions that arise when translating referents across different contexts. Yet crucially, the author does not mention Dittborn's signature gesture – the infiltration of the mail system – and focuses

exclusively on strategies that the artist deploys *inside* his canvases such as quotation and reinsertion of images. This omission is noteworthy since the artist situates the political content of his work precisely in the folds of his paintings, which contain ‘a poisonous powder hidden there’ (Dittborn 1993: 20). One could argue that the artist’s own version of sabotage is the disguise of a painting that travels as a letter. After being folded and put into an envelope, the painting is stamped and certified by the same administrative apparatus denounced by the work, yet Richard does not refer to this, preferring to discuss the multiplicity of referents and techniques used within his artworks.

In a different chapter, Richard (1986: 98) mentions that ‘he [Dittborn] superimposes and interconnects a number of local or popular images from peripheral cultures and elaborates them through a metaphor of transcontinental or itinerant painting’. There is a subtle allusion to travel in this quote, yet she does not reveal the artist’s gesture completely. An unaware or uninformed reader would therefore not be able to put together all the pieces that form Dittborn’s work and, if only reading Richard’s text, would not know about the *Aeropostales* journey. It could even be argued that the reader needs to know this beforehand and be complicit in advance.

If the context of the dictatorship did not allow for a further engagement with the public/reader for this to happen, I would like to argue that there was a virtual, late spectator/reader for the *avanzada* works, and that this early desire has been fulfilled in the subsequent years, particularly with the 2007 publication. Indeed, Richard expresses a notion of imagined futures and potentials. In response to the philosopher Willy Thayer’s (2003) criticism of her discursive use of bellicose terms that mirror the violence of the *coup*, for instance, she suggests a desire to transform, through her writing, the vertical or hierarchical military intervention into an horizontal scene in which established meanings are blown apart and re-inscribed (Richard 2007b: 53).⁴ She mentions the need to leave a space for the

‘fluctuaciones contingentes de lo que *todavía no es* y de lo que está siempre a tiempo de *volverse otro*’ [the contingent fluctuations of what is *yet to be*, and what is always ready *to become other*] (Richard 2007b: 76; emphasis in the original). Retrospectively, and regardless of the original intentions of either the author or the editors of the Australian book, the very decision to published a bilingual edition and have the copies sent to Chile in 1986 confirms this desire to find new readers in a different context.

[A]A theatre with no spectators

Another essential, and largely overlooked aspect of Richard’s project, is the fact that a number of the *avanzada* works were ephemeral actions, originally intended as semi-private gestures, with almost no public beyond the artists’ immediate circle, leaving very few traces apart from some photographic documents. This shapes a very particular relationship between the artwork and a potential viewer: the artist was virtually alone when executing the art action, yet the public becomes a delayed witness of it through the document.

In relation to this, Valdés (1987: 84) writes that the term ‘autismo’ [autism] could describe this writing or performing ‘para y desde un grupo’ [for and from a group], or simply the writing just for oneself. In some cases, she adds, the only real interlocutor for these artworks is the artist himself/herself. Some of the black and white photographs included in *Margins and Institutions* add to this condition of isolation and seclusion: there are various close-up images of artists’ bodies in the act of performing, zoomed-in faces, such as Raúl Zurita in *No, no puedo más* [No, I can’t stand it any longer] from 1979, depicting a bloody cut on the poet’s upper cheekbones and a face stained with semen and blood. In a close-up shot of his face, Zurita looks directly and deeply into the lens with a gaze that expresses an awareness of being observed. This could suggest a situation of confinement, of being both alone and examined at the same time. Reading the invasiveness of the image in relation to the work’s

title, this gesture could also imply a performative act of confessing the intimate action of self-harm to the public through the photograph.

A similar sense of claustrophobic confinement is found in the close-up of the open, screaming mouth of Carlos Leppe in the video installation *Sala de espera*. In the picture (reproduced in a double-page spread), his mouth, painted with lipstick, is being stretched by what appears to be an invasive and torturous medical instrument, making a covert statement about the systematic use of torture during the dictatorship in Chile. Another image of the same performance shows him alone, bandaged, with his arms raised, in a room of a hospital or a mental health institution, emphasizing both a visceral exposure of his sorrow and the social alienation experienced during this period. As in several of the images printed in *Margins and Institutions*, the spectators are not visible, which reinforces the lack of an immediate public for these artworks.

As a result, it appears that the first and most direct witness or spectator of these works is Nelly Richard herself, who was particularly close to Leppe and worked (and lived) with him in a collaborative manner during this period.⁵ The paradigmatic work *Cuerpo correccional* [Punishable body] – a collaborative book and art project between Richard and Leppe that gathers the artist's works from 1974 to 1980 and poses a number of issues around sexual identity, love, catharsis, parody, and subversion – is a testament to this joint effort. According to Pablo Oyarzún (1987: 45), Richard rescued the production of the *avanzada* by constituting it as a group while, at the same time, rescuing herself 'como su testigo más fiel' [as its most loyal witness]. It could be argued then that Richard's endeavour has a virtual accomplice: the public that, paradoxically, appears as a potential reader of the text rather than a viewer or spectator.⁶ 'Each double or reversible sign contains a series of implicit meanings which are activated by the particular circumstances called for on the part of *accomplices*'

(Richard 1986: 31; emphasis in the original), she argues, inviting the public to decipher the concealed language of the works.

Additionally, in her writing the public appears to have a role even beyond this critical engagement with the artworks. The audience is also part of her project of constructing a scene that was clearly different from other forms of political art in Chile, which during the dictatorship produced semi-clandestine work with direct allusions to political circumstances. Organizations such as Coordinador Cultural, from 1982, or the A.P.J., from 1979, are examples of this approach that conceived the artist as another worker and rejected the traditional art circuit in favour of spaces like factories, schools and social housing. In the following quotation Richard differentiates the work of the *avanzada* from that of the street art *brigades* like *Ramona Parra* (the muralist group associated with the PC, the Chilean communist party), while claiming a new role for the spectator.

[EXT]The Chilean in the street no longer sees the ornamented walls as a space for graffiti or political propaganda, he is no longer a passive spectator of images but actively involved in the creative process: he becomes part of the living material of the work through his own interaction with it by being urged to intervene in the whole network of social conditioning in which he is snared (Richard 1986: 54).[end EXT]

This conception imagines a very active receptor: the communicative experience of the artwork is meant to be completed by an aware reader who is able to decode its meaning, even as a late or ‘delayed’ spectator. Philip Auslander’s (2008, 2009) body of work exploring the complexity of the process of documentation of ephemeral, performance-based art pieces seems useful in addressing this, particularly because he conceives a public that could be

actively engaged with the artwork even without experiencing it at first hand. The author therefore challenges the common assumption that an encounter with a performance through a mediated form (recordings, photographs) provides a less meaningful experience for the audience than the encounter with the live act.

Drawing on the work of Walter Benjamin and Hans-Georg Gadamer, Auslander argues that reproduction brings the performance to 'me' (or to 'us'). The author is particularly intrigued by Benjamin's use of the word 'halfway' in the artwork essay when asking if the reproduction is able or not to provide 'historical testimony' (Auslander 2009: 84). If, as Benjamin writes, the original meets the beholder 'halfway', Auslander (2009: 83) argues that that encounter with the document or reproduction is neither a substitute or replication, nor a prosthetic device that extends the original, but rather an agent of 'reactivation': '[It] discloses the original, but discloses it under different circumstances' (Auslander 2009: 85). The original event is reactivated in the present tense, not as a replica from the past, yet it invokes the past too. Reading this notion of 'halfway' through Gadamer's concept of 'fusion', Auslander concludes that the encounter with the document triggers a productive experience in which we know about something in its current context, while being aware that it comes from somewhere else.

It could be argued that *Margins and Institutions* is acting here as the agent of 'reactivation' but only in its encounter with the imagined audience: if some of these gestures occurred in solitary and private spaces, what activates their critical potential is the fact that they are recognized retrospectively as belonging to a specific scene, and that the originally absent public is able to engage with them later. The document exceeds its indexical function and becomes the vehicle by which to encounter, and to complete, the artwork.

According to Auslander (2009: 82), it is essential to pay attention to the performances, their mediations and the audiences that engage with those mediations. The most important

relationship in this equation might be the one between the mediator (the document) and its public, who is, in this case, the accomplice of Richard's project. The fact that the author disregards the notion of authenticity as a seemingly original event and rather defines it as the relationship between the beholder and the document is relevant when discussing some of the *avanzada* works. Because of the lack of immediate witnesses, in several occasions these art actions have been spoken about as a mythic rumour (Neustadt 2001), alluding to the different and sometimes contradictory versions about them that circulate in the local context.

This relationship between the presence of a witness and the claim of originality and authenticity is important, for instance, in Lotty Rosenfeld's *Una milla de cruces en el pavimento* (A mile of crosses on the pavement, 1979), which was initially carried out near the artist's house in Santiago in front of very few people. In this action Rosenfeld draws several crosses by bisecting the white traffic lines painted in the street; through this interference into the normative ciphers of everyday life she makes a covert comment about death while also transforming the sign from a negative to a positive referent. *Margins and Institutions* includes a photograph in a double-page spread and six small images of some of the re-enactments of this work that Rosenfeld has done over the years, both in Chile and internationally. Images of the original or first art action are not included.

The public/reader of *Margins and Institutions* does not have access to the 'original' action, neither as a direct witness nor as a 'viewer' of the mediated form (the photograph) of it. Yet if one were reading this according to Auslander's line of argument – which primarily discusses recorded sound and the performance of it, but also asserts its value to address other forms of documentation and reproduction – the truth or authenticity of that original event would not be the most determinant aspect of the work since each time the public is 'perceiving the document itself as a performance ... for which we are the present audience' (Auslander 2009: 82). That original art action in Santiago would not have an advantaged

position in relation to the later versions either, because it is the circulation of the document that produces the ‘event as performance’ and ‘the performer as an artist’ (Auslander 2012: 53). This might come close to the presentation of any staged event like an opera or musical production, but Auslander does not privilege the physical encounter between the performer and the audience as would happen, for instance, in a re-enactment; rather, the author is interested in the encounter with the mediated form of the performance, and with the engaged, active relationship between the document and its beholder. The document speaks of the event but might not correspond to it entirely; indeed, if it was or was not created during the actual action, whether it is ‘original’ in that sense, becomes almost irrelevant for the encounter with the public.

In this sense, the performance is only completed when it reaches the beholder (as document), who is initially a virtual rather than an immediate spectator, as if the (solitary) artist embodies the public rather than performs for an audience. In some cases, events could be ‘staged to be documented at least as much as to be seen by an audience’ (Auslander 2012: 51), which confirms the capacity of both the document to engage the public even at a much later stage and of the audience to restore the political potential of an artwork. Through its use of a concealed discursive strategy, Richard’s text established a marginal yet visible space from which to read these works as belonging to a scene, without exhausting the meanings that could, potentially, be attributed to them. A late dissenter or *saboteur* might be constituted in this encounter between the public and the document, which triggers new understandings of the artworks now that the connection between art and politics might feel less urgent yet equally needed.

¹ These remarks were made in a short email interview the author conducted with Foss in April 2014.

² Richard had already attempted to promote the *avanzada* through initiatives such as curating a group of works for the Paris Biennale in 1980, but this project had had a poor reception (Machiavello 2012: 90).

³ The concept of '*detenidos desaparecidos*' [disappeared] is used in Chile and other Latin American countries to refer to individuals who, after being detained by state agents or by people hired by them, have never been seen again. There is a 'moral certainty' about their fate: these individuals were killed and their bodies were disposed of (Informe Rettig 1991: 18).

⁴ This exchange was initiated with the publication of Thayer's text 'El golpe como consumación de la vanguardia' [The coup as the avant-garde consummation]. The critical discussion between both authors has continued over the years.

⁵ See Godoy Vega (2012) for a discussion of the close relationship between Richard and Leppe.

⁶ It is important to note that other works featured in *Margins and Institutions*, such as CADA's *Para no morir de hambre en el arte* [Not to die of hunger in art], present a more direct interaction with the viewer.

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